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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT LOUIS 000267

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

AF/E FOR MARIA BEYZEROV
NAIROBI FOR RANDY FLEITMAN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PROP](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [SE](#)
SUBJECT: SPPF LOSES CHANCE TO CHANGE CONSTITUTION BUT CASTS A SHADOW
ON SEYCHELLES' ELECTIONS

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) The Seychelles National Party (SNP) won the July 18 by-election provoked by the resignation of Jean Francois Ferrari, thus, the ruling Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF) remains one seat shy of being able to amend the constitution. Oddly enough, had the SPPF won this seat, it could have gained a two-thirds majority in the Parliament and thus obtained the ability to change the constitution unilaterally. The SPPF, however, boycotted the election at the instruction of former President Albert Rene, reportedly to save resources for general elections rather than contest a seat in an SNP stronghold. Rumors of SPPF-conducted voter intimidation -- meant to keep voter turnout low -- abound in the press. Some public sources cite this as the reason for the low voter turnout rate of 26 percent.

FERRARI RESIGNS FROM NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

¶2. (U) On June 17 during a session of the National Assembly, House Speaker, Dr. Patrick Herminie, allegedly ignored a motion made by an opposition National Assembly member Jean Francois Ferrari, who wanted to intervene on the Civil Servants Ethics Bill. When Herminie failed to allow motion, Ferrari protested and the Speaker subsequently ousted him from the National Assembly and ordered the Police to physically remove Ferrari from the building. Ferrari, an SNP Member of National Assembly (MNA), then announced his resignation on June 20, as a protest for the treatment he received in the National Assembly. According to opposition newspapers, this incident was the "last straw in a long list of mind games" played by Herminie on Opposition MNAs.

VOTER INTIMIDATION POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTOR TO LOW VOTER TURNOUT

¶3. (U) Post contacts reported that since Ferrari's constituency, Mont Fleuri, is currently an SNP bastion, there was little chance that the party would have lost this by-election. The SPPF seemed to think along these same lines, with local press reporting that the SPPF planned to use the money saved on this bid towards the 2011 Legislative elections. According to both press reports and EMBOFFS conversations with opposition contacts, since SPPF had little hope of winning the election they would rather undermine the election through an organized boycott-- therefore sacrificing the opportunity to gain the two-thirds majority in Parliament necessary to be able to change the constitution unilaterally. In a June 26 interview on the state-owned Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation television network, former President Albert Ren called on SPPF supporters to "stay at home" on Election Day. The SPPF party also issued a press release announcing that they would not participate in the by-election, which it dubbed "childish and a farce" (The Nation,

June 27).

¶4. (SBU) According to press reports, Mont Fleuri public servants feared reprisals were they to vote in the election. On 28 June, a group of public servants wrote a letter to Paul Chow, leader of the Democratic Party (DP), to ask him to withdraw his party's candidate from the by-election race, so only the SNP candidate would remain on the ballot. With only one candidate, a vote would not be necessary and public servants would no longer be vulnerable to any voting-related reprisals. (NOTE: Public servants make up the majority of the workforce throughout the country. After the unexpected sacking of 56 officials in July 2007, many of them continue to fear losing their job for voicing opposition to the SPPF. END NOTE.) SNP leader, Wavel Ramkalawan, told EMBOFFS that some voters feared losing their jobs, or that their bank loan or license applications could be rejected.

¶5. (SBU) The June 28 letter addressed to Chow referred to monitoring done by SPPF supporters that allegedly took place since Ferrari's resignation announcement. The civil servants' letter voiced concern that, "... [The] SPPF have now become more violent than ever."

¶6. (U) After the by-election, officials from both factions of the opposition, SNP and DP, complained of SPPF voter monitoring done on Election Day. SNP head, Wavel Ramkalawan, said that his party filed harassment complaints with the Electoral Commissioner's Office.

¶7. (U) Only 704 out of 2,655 registered voters (26 percent) voted. This is considerably low compared to the usual high voter turnout (87.6 percent in 2007 general elections) for the Seychelles. As this was the first by-election since the multi-party system began

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with the Third Republic in 1992, comparisons only can be made with general election turnouts. The opposition, however, attributed the low voter turnout directly to what they labeled a "terror campaign" conducted by the SPPF.

OPPOSITION REMAINS DIVIDED

¶8. (U) The three-week campaign leading to the by-election also revealed that opposition parties, SNP and DP, are not any closer to brokering a new political alliance or rebuilding the relationship they once shared. This informal alliance between SNP and DP ended in October 2007 following divergent views on the One-China policy and a Seychelles-France surveillance agreement for Seychelles' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). As a result, Frank Elizabeth, the then proportional elected DP candidate, lost his seat to an SNP candidate. The relations between the two opposition parties have been sour ever since. (Note: This relationship is important because it was the joining of the two opposition parties in May 2007 that prevented the SPPF from obtaining full control of the National Assembly. End Note.)

¶9. (SBU) Ramkalawan told EMBOFFS that any alliance with DP is now "dead" because DP stood against the SNP in this by-election; however, both the Seychelles Weekly and The Nation reported exchanges of correspondences between both opposition leaders. Ramkalawan failed to mention the aforementioned exchange of correspondences, but did say that Chow does not represent the DP directorate. According to press articles before the by-election, Chow said that his party would be ready to withdraw their candidate if SNP would only accept going into alliance again.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Albert Ren's appeal to voters to not vote and the apparent fear expressed by some public servants could have impacted the voter turn-out. Regardless, the manner in which the by-elections came about suggests that Ren, who stepped down as leader in 2004, is still a key player in the SPPF party and in

Seychelles politics. For some time, Embassy contacts have reported growing uneasiness among a variety of senior SPPF officials, to include President James Alix Michel, who feel constrained in their ability to make decisions. It is interesting to note, therefore, that it was Rene and not Michel who made the public statements about the by-election.

CABRERA